

ISLAND WOMEN

Chris Faiers



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in 1994 and in 1995 created its own Imprint: Books On Disk [BOD]. HMS Press
ceased its electronic book publishing in 1999. ADP and BOD ran out of London Ontario. The National Library of Canada
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Island Women

Chris Faiers, HMS Press, 1983 20p

Review by Stuart Ross *Mondohunkamooga* Feb. 1984

Faiers's least overtly political collection, these idyllic, lyrical island poems are his most successful to date. Certainly not great stuff, but sort of pleasant. Very bizarre design: printed entirely on annoying cover stock, with photos that belong in your dentist's office.

Island Women

Chris Faiers, HMS Press, 1983

D.S.P. *Rubicon*, No. 3 (summer 1984)

Chris Faiers, hero of the chapbook brigade and darling of the Toronto readings series, is at it again, this time with a suite of poems about the West Indies and the West Indians. Faiers's poetry is as buoyant and sensual as the islands that inspired it; whether writing of tropical fruit or tropical women, or even Jamaican kitchen workers in Toronto, he writes always of experience and delight. No ponderous introspection burdens this beach-pastoral. But this sweetness, like that of the mango, becomes cloying when overdone: . . . *returning / with mangoes, rum, coconuts and / love / which fades so much more slowly / than a tourists sunburn.*

ISLAND WOMEN

Chris Faiers 1983

HMS Press

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JESSIE

I miss the morning taste
of herb tea
in a styrofoam cup

and you still have me laughing
remembering how you called
the busy dump trucks scuttling
beneath our sterile office highrise
"tipperbodies"

Jessie, I see you over the sink
washing the new cook's pots
filling and emptying the twin sinks
with all the patience
of the Jamaican tides

THE ISLAND WOMEN

Every Christmas they return
to Jamaica, Barbados
Trinidad
stuffing plastic shopping bags
with diapers, records
and cosmetics

hand-plaited bags filled returning
with mangoes, rum, coconuts and
love
which fades so much more slowly
than a tourist's sunburn

JESSIE, MAISIE AND PAT

After cleanup you slowly emerge
from the change room like so
many red and pink hibiscus blooming
so many spiky green aloes
and golden sunsets waving
across blue seas of cloth

The subway at University and Dundas
has never burned before
in the middle of a snowstorm

FIVE HOURS

Our shadow sails lightly over ocean blue
casually eclipses the darker shadow
of a shark shimmering lazily
across ribbed sand shoals

HAMMERHEAD

I only saw you once
in the tidal turmoil between islands
I am glad I never met you
diving for lobsters
diving among pink sea fans
turning red with my blood

HURRICANE

Before you had blown out
I was surfing your jigsaw waves
Storm-crazed six footers
Ripping sideways into the beach

Hurricane waves you carried me out
beyond my ego, my depth
I remember swimming desperately for shore
barely making it
panting
on the sands
vomiting
Hurricane, hurricane
Hurricane

PLAYMATES

a true story in Barbados
the mother came home early
to find her baby daughter
playing with the viper.
she was kissing and caressing it
as it slithered
over her giggling body

the mother fainted

when she awoke
neighbours filled the hole
with cement

the little girl died soon after
from a broken heart

CORAL SNAKE

"Red touch yellow
kill a fellow
Red touch black
good for Jack"

Our neighbour casually
dug in her garden
cut you in half

the bands
were
red...yellow

THE EVENING TOURISTS

The evening tourists
waist deep in the dusk
between sips watch the island boys
pulling the stubborn thick rope
past them down the breakwater.

As we touch the beach
one finally realizes
that we are successfully
sharking

PALMETTO

You are a guerrilla among flora
a fan always hiding
always shading the meaning

When I was a child
your thickness the first layer
on our huts

Palmetto
you are green
green as aloe
and your salving quality
is your secrecy

SOLDIER PALM

You do not wander
your trunk erect
as a soldier's back at inspection

Sentinels
you always line driveways
avenues
important people are always marching past
striding
into equatorial destinies
I would rather not
Imagine

ALOE

Your spikes intimidate
like a doctor's needles
Aloe, medicine of the tropics
your sticky balm a salvation
if you avoid the spines
and work carefully
and work carefully

MANGO

If there was a wine
fermented from your sweet juice
I would burp with bliss all night

Mango, you are too sweet
you are a liqueur
to sweet, too healthy

Mango, peach of the tropics
a sweet Cancer moon distilled

TO GRACE

The red hibiscus blossoms and withers alone
there is no white hibiscus tonight
to bloom beside me

I want to dream
of gentle island waves lapping
of bronze Chinese limbs
wrapped around me

The Chinese girl of the white hibiscus
is carrying baskets to market
I am asleep on the beach
There is too much room
in this sandy bed
in this ocean of my heart

COCONUT PALM

You twist, turn
survive
Your hardy fruit
can cross oceans
and still flourish

FARLEY HILL, BARBADOS

We climb past Bajan Sunday drivers
picnicking among the flower garden
ruins of a slave plantation.
Pine trees skirt the brow of Farley Hill
their needles reminiscent of a colder land
a colder people
below us the earth drops
and then gently rolls to the sea

The homesick plantation owners chose well.
It does look like Scotland.
Focus on the sea
ignore the rippling motions
which only wind through sugar cane makes.
Transport from this beautiful island
of sugar and bleeding flowers
to the primmer beauty of a Scottish highland
where virginal heather only hints at blooming

There is a force too strong here to ignore.
If you looked to the sea to hide your thoughts
slave owner
you would slowly have been swallowed . . .
Those endless swells have travelled
six thousand unbroken miles from Africa.
they have not seen land until they reached your shores
slave owner
and their force was not broken on your beaches
but only coming home.